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PROGRAM The MacNeil/Lehrer Report

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SUBJECT CIA and Its Restrictions

JIM LEHRER: There are those who say events in Iran and Afghanistan might have gone differently if only the CIA were alive and well. It's the meaty timely part of an argument over restrictions, one often framed in canine terms: Does the CIA have too tight a leash on it? And is it time to loosen or remove that leash? Questions, among others, we pose tonight to a high-ranking CIA official, two key members of the Senate Intelligence Committee, and a civil liberties lawyer.

CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT: The flurry of activity over the CIA was sparked by President Carter's State of the Union message. He called for removing the, quote, unwarranted restraints on our ability to collect intelligence, unquote.

Since then, two major efforts have been launched to do just that. One is a bill announced by seven senators last week; the other, an idea that has been in the works for three years, responds directly to President Carter's call for a new charter to, quote, define clearly the legal authority and accountability of our intelligence agencies, period, close quotes.

The main target of the proposed legislation is the 1974 Hughes-Ryan Amendment that required tighter controls on the agency by both the President and Congress. That law was passed in the wake of reports of widespread abuses by the CIA in the '70s that ranged from character assassination campaigns aimed at Americans to real assassination plots against foreigners.

LEHRER: First, the CIA's own view of its problems from the agency's number two man, Frank Carlucci. He's a career Foreign Service Officer who was the U.S. Ambassador to Portugal